

IONEDUCATION NEWS-LETTER

June 2018 - Volume 1 / Issue 27



Higher education institutions can now offer degrees for online courses too



Higher Educational Institutions (HEI) can now offer certificate, diploma and degree programmes in full-fledged online mode, along with, as has been the norm, those offered in the regular mode, subject to certain conditions, the government announced on Thursday.

These regulations will be made applicable from the academic session 2018-19. The rule came into being after approval of UGC (Online Courses) Regulations, 2018, by the University Grants Commission.

According to a Human Resource Development Ministry statement, these institutions can accredit students in online mode "in only those disciplines in which it has already been offering the same or similar programmes/courses at graduation level in regular mode (of classroom teaching) or in Open and Distance Learning modes and from which at least one batch has graduated and approved by the statutory councils, as applicable".

Online programmes requiring practical/laboratory courses as curricular

requirement shall not be permitted, it said.

The statement said only those institutions will be allowed to offer online programmes which have been in existence for at least five years and are accredited by the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) with a valid minimum score of 3.26 on a 4-point scale.

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Link: <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/industry/services/education/higher-education-institutions-can-now-offer-degrees-for-online-courses-too/articleshow/64309991.cms>

The proposed merger of the two apex bodies for higher education - the UGC and the AICTE

The Human Resource Development Ministry had last year proposed to fuse the University Grants Commission (UGC) and All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE) into the Higher Education Empowerment Regulation Agency (HEERA).

The proposed merger of the two apex bodies for higher education - the UGC and the AICTE - may not come about before 2019 as it has been shelved till the Narendra Modi government gets a majority in the upper house of Parliament, an informed source has said.

A ministry source, however, told IANS that since the establishing HEERA will require approval in both houses of Parliament, the government may wait till it has the majority in the Rajya Sabha.

"This is one of the political factors. Apart from this, the framework of the body is still being worked upon. But the idea of bringing it before the Parliament has been postponed for now," the source said.

The proposed agency may have two Vice-Chairpersons to look after the work which at present come under the UGC and the AICTE.

UGC is a statutory body established to accord degrees and grants and to set up quality benchmarks for the higher education institutes, while AICTE, also a statutory body, came up to oversee setting up of technical institutes and their quality.

Link: <https://www.ndtv.com/education/ugc-aicte-merger-may-not-come-about-till-2019-1861158>

Modi government prepares to change higher education forever in one sweeping strike



Within days of indicating that it may introduce a bill in Parliament to create a single higher education regulator before the 2019 general elections, the Modi government has drawn up the draft legislation.

Accessed by ET, the draft legislation for setting up a ‘Higher Education Evaluation and Regulation Authority, 2018’ (HEERA) or Higher Education Regulatory Council (HERC), says that once the new regulator is created, existing regulatory authorities such as the University Grants Commission (UGC), All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE) and the National Council for Technical Education (NCTE) will be scrapped.

Signifying a shift in the higher education regulatory regime, this draft Bill calls for a new regulator that will mentor institutes, besides defining academic standards. While it won’t have grant-giving powers, HEERA will be armed with zero tolerance mechanisms for violations, including provisions to terminate the affiliation of an institute.

The draft Bill is being discussed by the government and is being scrutinized by the Prime Minister’s Office; it will be a key discussion agenda for a policy retreat that the HRD ministry is planning during month-end in Mussourie for drawing up a New Education Strategy for 2022. The HRD ministry had announced a 40-point action plan in April where it said that it was planning to bring the HEERA Bill in Parliament by September 2018.

WHAT'S IN THE BILL

The HEERA Bill says that the new authority will focus on setting quality standards for institutions, specify learning outcomes, lay down standards of teaching assessment and research and evaluate the yearly academic performance of the institutes on clearly laid criteria.

ET has learned that a number of committees have been set up in the UGC to develop the academic standards and learning outcomes for each course. These will become part of the HEERA.

The HEERA, unlike UGC, will “provide for training/mentoring of institutions found to be failing in maintaining required academic standards”.

Central or state government grants to an institute will require that they meet the standards outlined by the HEERA. Funding will be largely vested with the HRD ministry which will release grants based on annual action plans presented by institutes rather than just dole out money.

But there's still debate over how to bring state universities within the ambit of HEERA, and whether regulation of teacher education institutes should be within its purview.

Unlike the UGC Act, the new single education regulator will be backed by more teeth. It will be able to bar an institute from admitting new students in a particular course if it is established that it has violated the quality benchmarks. It will also be able to terminate affiliation of such an institute and provide for measures to safeguard the interest of the enrolled students.

HEERA may provide expert advice 'to any institution or its departments for 'promoting excellence'. If any university is found to grant affiliation to a course in contravention of regulations of the HEERA, it may be faced with a penalty, fine, withdrawal of degree-granting powers and in dire cases, even a direction to cease all operations. A three-year imprisonment has been proposed for those that fail to comply with the penalty imposed. HEERA, like UGC, will specify and notify degrees and their nomenclature, have the right to bring a variety of regulations for the maintenance of standards at varsities. It will come under CAG's scanner and will also take directions from the Centre on policy matters.

The ten-member HEERA will have an eminent academician as a chairperson, who will be assisted by two Vice-Chairpersons, three members who may have served at least for five years as Directors of an IIT/IIM/IISc/IISER/IISc, another three members who may serve for a minimum of five years as a Vice-chancellor of a reputed state or central university.

Link: <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/centre-drafts-bill-for-single-higher-education-regulator/articleshow/64023596.cms>

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